

FROM THE BOOKSHELF #143  
ROGER LYONS

JUNE 1, 1976

"A FINE ROMANCE" BY CYNTHIA SETON

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU NOW ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES FROM THE BOOKSHELF -- A SERIES IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE CURRENTLY READING. TODAY, A REPORT BY ROGER LYONS ON A NEW NOVEL BY CYNTHIA SETON ENTITLED A FINE ROMANCE, PUBLISHED BY NORTON. HERE NOW IS YOUR BOOK EDITOR -----.

EDITOR: IT'S A CHILLY CHRISTMAS WEEK IN THE YEAR 1973, THE TIME OF THE ARAB OIL BOYCOTT AND THE DISAPPOINTING APPEARANCE OR NON-APPEARANCE OF THE COMET KOHOUTEK. TWO AMERICAN FAMILIES, THE KIND OF PEOPLE YOU'D EXPECT TO CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS AT HOME AND HEARTH, ARE ON AN EIGHT-DAY BUS TOUR OF SICILY. DR. GERARD WINTERS, A HEART SPECIALIST, HAS BEEN PERSUADED TO TAKE PART IN THIS ADVENTURE BY HIS WIFE KITTY WHOSE RESTLESSNESS EXPRESSES ITSELF IN AN IRRESISTIBLE WANDERLUST.

ON THE SAME BUS, AMONG THE TWENTY-FIVE-OR-SO TOURISTS, IS HARRY CASAGRANDE, AN AMERICAN CIVIL ENGINEER. SINCE HIS JOB IS TO JUDGE THE FEASIBILITY OF LARGE OVERSEAS PROJECTS, HE HAS LIVED AND WORKED IN TWENTY-THREE COUNTRIES. WITH HIM IS HIS SINGLE SISTER-IN-LAW, A SUCCESSFUL WRITER, AND HIS TWO STRIKING DAUGHTERS, ALEXIA THE BEAUTIFUL FROM WASHINGTON, D.C. AND TALL, GAUGLING MINI WHO IS SUFFERING FROM A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN AS A RESULT OF AN UNHAPPY ROMANCE. IT WAS GRANDFATHER WHO SUGGESTED THE TRIP AS A POSSIBLE

EDITOR: REMEDY. EXCEPT FOR THE PRECOCIOUS, PERCEPTIVE WINTERS  
(CONT'D) CHILDREN, ALL MEMBERS OF BOTH PARTIES ARE EXPERIENCING  
VARIOUS MINOR CRISES THAT RESULT FROM LIVING IN A  
TUMULTUOUS CENTURY. IMMEDIATELY, GERARD, AND LATER,  
KITTY, BECOME FASCINATED WITH THE UNORTHODOX CASAGRANDE  
PARTY OF FOUR. HOW THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE TWO  
FAMILIES AFFECT ALL THEIR LIVES IN THE MAIN THEME OF THE  
NOVEL.

CYNTHIA SETON DESCRIBES HERSELF AS AN AUTHOR WHOSE FRIENDS  
PUSHED HER INTO WRITING NOVELS TO KEEP HER FROM PREACHING  
FEMINISM. BUT IF THIS NOVEL REFLECTS COMMITTED FEMINISM,  
IT IS A VERY TEMPERATE SORT, FOR SHE HAS LENT TWO-THIRDS  
OF HER SYMPATHY TO MEN. THE DRAIN OF THE NOVEL ARISES  
FROM KITTY'S QUESTION TO HERSELF, OBVIOUSLY THE AUTHOR'S,  
AS TO, WHY, AFTER MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS OF MARRIAGE,  
WOMEN STAY WITH THEIR SPOUSES. ACTUALLY, THE QUESTION  
OCCURRED TO KITTY ONLY THREE YEARS BEFORE. UNTIL THEN,  
SHE HAD BEEN SATISFIED WITH THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN  
WHICH SHE DEVOTED HER LIFE TO THE DRUDGERY OF REARING SIX  
CHILDREN AND ATTENDING TO THE COMFORTS OF HER HUSBAND  
WHILE HE DEVOTED HIMSELF TO BREAD-WINNING AND ADIRING  
HIS ATTRACTIVE WIFE. BUT THEN, THE AUTHOR RELATES:

VOICE: "...SHE JOINED A WOMAN'S SUPPORT GROUP, CASUALLY, THE ONLY  
WOMAN OF THE THE ORIGINAL TEN WHO HAD NOT LEFT HER FAMILY.

OF COURSE, SHE UNDERSTOOD THAT IT WAS A COINCIDENCE FOR  
THINGS TO FALL OUT THAT WAY IN HER GROUP. SHE WAS THE

VOICE:  
(CONT'D)

↑ OLDEST, FORTY-SEVEN. AND NOBODY ELSE HAD SIX CHILDREN.

OK AND HER VOICE WAS ALWAYS THE CONSERVATIVE VOICE. /NONETHELESS,

SHE AS WELL AS THE OTHERS HAD PULLED OUT FROM THE PAST  
THE WHOLE SUCCESSFUL, PRODUCTIVE HISTORY OF HERSELF AND  
BROKEN IT TO PIECES. TOGETHER THEY LAUGHED AT THE PARTS  
WITH HIGH MORAL PURPOSE AND THEY WEPT FOR THE WASTE OF  
WIT AND HUMOR."

EDITOR: THERE WAS A STRETCH OF TIME WHEN SHE THOUGHT SERIOUSLY OF  
LEAVING GERARD, BUT SHE THOUGHT BETTER OF IT, AND INSTEAD  
ENTERED THE SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL. AND SO, SHE PASSED THROUGH, SHE THOUGHT,  
THE ONLY CRISIS OF HER LIFE AND EMERGED "ON THE OTHER  
SIDE, TRIUMPHANT WITH SELF-RESPECT." BUT ACTUALLY, SHE  
WASN'T QUITE RECONCILED TO TAKING UP THE OLD LIFE. AS  
THE AUTHOR DESCRIBES IT:

VOICE: "THERE WERE ONLY A FEW LOOSE ENDS, ALL OF THEM CONNECTED  
WITH GERARD. GERARD HAD LIVED THROUGH THESE FEW YEARS WITH  
THE GREATEST PATIENCE TOWARD HER AND THE LEAST POSSIBLE  
UNDERSTANDING HE COULD MANAGE. MOREOVER, HE DID NOT KNOW  
THE CRISIS WAS OVER, DID NOT KNOW THERE HAD EVEN BEEN A  
CRISIS."

EDITOR: SUCH ARE THE STRANDS OF PLOT AND THE CAST OF CHARACTERS FROM  
WHICH THE AUTHOR WEAVES AN EXPERT COMEDY WITH DEEPLY SERIOUS  
OVERTONES. SOME OF THEM MUST HAVE A FAMILIAR RING TO MANY  
READERS. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE RESULT OF THE WINTER'S  
MARRIAGE PROBLEMS AT THE MOMENT IS AN UNSATISFACTORY SEX  
LIFE. DURING THE COURSE OF THE TRIP, THE TWO FAMILIES

EDITOR: BECOME STIMULATED AND EXHILARATED BY ONE AN'OTHER. THE  
(CONT'D) CLIMAX OF THE STORY OCCURS ONE STORMY NIGHT WHEN THE TOUR  
BUS CRASHES THROUGH THE GUARD RAIL ON THE SIDE OF MOUNT  
ETNA. THE INJURIES, FORTUNATELY NOT CRITICAL, KEEP  
DR. WINTERS BUSY WHILE CASAGRADE DEFTLY CUTS THROUGH  
BUREAUCRATIC RED TAPE TO ARRANGE FOR OUTSIDE HELP FROM A  
RED CROSS HELICOPTER. DESPITE ALL THE ACTIVITY, GERARD  
MANAGES TO HAVE A FLING WITH ALEXIA AND ONE GETS THE  
IMPRESSION, NEVER DIRECTLY VERIFIED, THAT KITTY AND THE  
BRIGHT ENGINEER HAVE HAD A BRIEF LIAISON. MIMI'S NEUROSIS  
SOLVES ITSELF, MOSTLY THROUGH HER INVOLVEMENT WITH THE  
WINTERS' CHILDREN. IN THE END, ALL PARTIES SEEM TO EMERGE  
REFRESHED BY THEIR EXPERIENCES AND READY TO RETURN TO LESS  
DARING LIVES.

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IN AN ERA WHEN MOST NOVELS ARE WRITTEN ABOUT SEEDY  
WEAKLINGS IN A HOSTILE WORLD, IT IS PLEASANT TO READ  
ABOUT DECENT HUMAN BEINGS WHO, DESPITE THEIR FOIBLES,  
HONESTLY TRY TO COME TO GRIPS WITH REAL MORAL PROBLEMS.  
MRS. SETON IS A KEEN AND WITTY OBSERVER OF THE HUMAN  
CONDITION. A FINE ROMANCE IS THAT RARITY IN A NOVEL  
THESE DAYS -- A BOOK THAT IS NOT ONLY ENTERTAINING BUT  
ALSO HIGHLY INSTRUCTIVE.

ANNCR: YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO A REPORT ON CYNTHIA  
SETON'S NOVEL A FINE ROMANCE. AND NOW AN INVITATION  
TO JOIN US NEXT WEEK (AT THIS TIME), WHEN THE VOICE OF  
AMERICA BRINGS YOU ANOTHER REPORT ON ONE OF THE MANY  
BOOKS AMERICANS ARE CHOOSING... FROM THE BOOKSHELF.